



[Albert Luthuli, 1898-1967](#)

The Freedom Charter as part of the NDR

This week we are looking at the Congress of the People campaign that in 1953 followed the Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign, which was in turn a consequence of the banning of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1950; plus we are looking at the Freedom Charter.

The 1955 Kliptown Congress of the People, where the Freedom Charter was adopted, was followed by a campaign of conscientisation and positive endorsement of the Freedom Charter both by individuals and by mass organisations. This was interrupted in 1956 by the Treason Trial of most of the Congress

Alliance leadership, which was not concluded until 1961, a year after Sharpeville and the banning of the ANC in the year of 1960.

In the previous post on this topic we looked at the “Call to the Congress of the People”, taking it as a typical tactical example of the conscious, deliberate, democratic formation of a collective revolutionary Subject of History through well-designed organisation.

Taken all together, we can see the 1950s as a time of focussed, concerted organising towards the NDR – a “process and not an event”, as we used to say.

This leaves us with the Freedom Charter itself. Nowadays it is often quoted as a bible, and without explicit reference to the NDR.

The Freedom Charter does say that “all who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers”. But it does not specifically say that political parties shall be free to organise. Nor does it say that women should organise as women, or as working women.

Hence there are two lessons coming out of the 1950s. One is the practical example of the movement’s work throughout the decade; the other is the rights-based Charter that was produced in the course of all the work.

This sometimes disconnected contrast between action and prescription remains characteristic of South African politics.

Picture: Chief Albert Luthuli, President of the ANC in the 1950s

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Call to the Congress of the People; Freedom Charter](#).
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